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AUTHOR Shoho, Alan R.
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ABSTRACT

A study was done that compared the parental involvement of three generations of Japanese Americans in their children's education, particularly their involvement in academic work and extracurricular activities and perceived barriers to involvement. First generation Japanese American immigrants are called "Isseis" in Japanese; second generation, first American-born, Japanese Americans are called "Niseis"; and the third generation Japanese Americans are called "Sanseis." The project used a case study oral history approach on 69 Japanese Americans in Hawaii who ranged in age from 29 to 81 years. There were 10 Isseis, 49 Niseis, and 10 Sanseis. Other sources of data included historical documents such as high school yearbooks, school newspapers, and student handbooks. The data were analyzed using a multiple comparative analysis. The results show that ensuing generations of Japanese Americans became more active and directly involved in the education of their children. This evolutional development was highly related to language communication and familiarity with the dominant culture. The Americanization of Japanese immigrants along with succeeding generations who were educated in American schools reflect the role that American parents play in the education of their children. For the immigrant generation, several social, economical, and cultural difficulties acted as barriers to parental participation. With the exception of time and economics, succeeding generations were not hampered by the same barriers as was the immigrant generation. Included are 11 references. (JB)

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Alan R. Shoho
University of Portland

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RUNNING HEAD: Parental Involvement of Japanese Americans

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An Historical Comparison of Parental Involvement of Three Generations of Japanese Americans (Issels, Nisels, Sansels) In the Education of their Children

In recent years there has been a growing body of evidence to support the involvement of parents in the education of their children (Gordon, 1978; Comer, 1980; Becker & Epstein, 1982; Tangri & Oliver, 1987; Moore, 1990). From this growing body of evidence, some of the cited benefits of parental involvement include increased student learning and achievement; greater social interaction between parent, child and school personnel; decreased absenteeism and disruptive behavior; and enhanced student motivation to work hard and do well (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Comer, 1980; Secada, 1989; Tangri & Moles, 1987).

Based on a review of literature there appears to be general agreement among educators that given the proper environment, parental involvement in the education of their children is an advantageous (and often critical) ingredient to creating an environment for effective student learning and achievement. To a large extent, this beneficial perception of parental involvement in the educational process is a by-product of the dominant culture existing in America's schools today. The problem with the dominant culture's perception is that it often conflicts with the perceptions of and realities faced by various ethnic minorities, especially newly immigrating families. For newly immigrating ethnic minorities at varying stages of socioeconomic development, there are a number of barriers to effective parental involvement in the educational process. Some of the barriers to parental involvement in education are language communication, economic survival, control of participatory structures, cultural distance, uncertainty about responsibility for failure, and no clarity about improvement (Fruchter, 1984; Pettit, 1987). Of particular note for the present study are the barriers of economic survival, cultural distance, and language (communication).

At a time when educators are prescribing greater parental involvement, cultural differences are being largely ignored by the dominant culture. This point is especially important in light of the dramatic changes in the world society and the increased immigration of people to America from diverse cultures.

For many Asian Americans, especially newly arriving immigrants, the difficulty of involving parents in the education of their children often becomes a twofold battle involving economic survival and a clash between ties to the former culture and the new dominant culture. For Asian American students, the parental involvement issue is complicated and interconnected to the dominant culture's perception of Asian Americans as "model minorities" in education (Divoky, 1988). As Americans read and hear about the educational success attained by various Asian Americans, a misperception illustrating Asian American parents as highly involved in the educational process is being inaccurately portrayed. In reality, Asian

American parents as a group are "quiet, submissive, and cooperative....it is likely that Asian American parents will become more assertive when they've lived in the U.S. for some period of time (Lee, 1988)."

Despite the real and perceived differences between various Asian American backgrounds and the dominant culture, educators continue to advocate parental involvement programs based on the dominant culture without consideration of cultural differences. Due to the lack of cultural consideration in employing ethnic minority parents, especially Asian Americans, the present study was undertaken to examine the historical evidence of one Asian American group which has been perceived to be successful. In little over a century, Japanese Americans as a group in Hawaii have risen from the lowly ranks of pineapple and sugar plantation laborers to hold a number of prominent positions in Hawaiian society. The primary vehicle for the ascend of Japanese Americans in Hawaii was education. Prior to the present study, there was a lack of documented evidence addressing the role which Japanese American parents played in the education of their children.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the parental involvement of three generations (Isseis, Niseis, and Sanseis) of Japanese American parents in Hawaii. The primary factors examined were the parental involvement of Japanese American parents in academic work and extracurricular activities. An important aspect of the present study was an examination of the barriers to parental involvement that Japanese American parents perceived as they evolved from non-English speaking immigrants to acculturated citizens of the dominant culture.

Methodology

A case study oral history approach was used to examine the parental involvement of three generations of Japanese Americans in Hawaii. The primary method for collecting data was the gathering of oral histories from study participants. The oral histories were collected through the use of a semi-structured interview designed to ascertain information regarding the extent of parental involvement experienced by study participants during their educational experiences. The collection of data was accomplished over a two year period between 1989 and 1991. The number of study participants in the present study was determined by the investigator. The collection of oral histories was terminated when information from study participants became saturated and continuation would result in diminished returns.

Due to the difficulty of finding and communicating with willing Issei (first generation, immigrants) study participants, the present study relied heavily on data collected by Niseis (second generation, first American born) and Sanseis (third generation) in a multiple comparative method. The multiple comparative method of collecting data incorporated viewpoints of study participants from a dual perspective of a parent and the recollection of being a child and what degree their parents were involved

in their education. Interviews with study participants were transcribed and checked by study participants for accuracy.

Other sources of data for the present study were historical documents such as high school yearbooks, school newspapers, and student handbooks. Each document was examined for evidence of Japanese American parental involvement and cross-checked against data collected from study participants.

Subjects

There were seventy-five study participants involved the present study. Sixty-nine study participants were Japanese Americans who were either educated or were parents of children who were educated in Hawaii's public school system. Out of the sixty-nine study participants, ten were identified as Isseis, forty-nine as Niseis, and ten as Sanseis. The age range of study participants varied from 29 to 81 years. There were seven female and three male Isseis, thirty male and nineteen female Niseis, and seven male and three female Sanseis.

In addition, the present study gathered oral testimonies from fifteen current and past teachers of Hawaii's public school system. Nine of the current and past teachers were also among the study participants cited above. This evidence was used as confirming and disconfirming evidence to cross-check against the perceptions and recollections of Japanese American study participants. The fifteen current and past teachers varied in ethnicity, age, and gender. There were nine female and six male teacher participants. The range of ages were from 35 to 81 years. The ethnicity of the teachers were as follows: nine of Japanese ancestry; three of Caucasian ancestry; two of Chinese ancestry; and one of mixed Hawaiian ancestry.

Analysis of Data

To analyze the qualitative data collected from the interviews with study participants, the present study incorporated a multiple comparative analysis. Using Erickson's frame of qualitative data analysis, the purpose of the data analysis was to "generate empirical assertions largely through induction" and to establish an evidentiary warrant" for systemically examining confirming as well as disconfirming data and analyzing negative cases (Erickson, 1986). Patterns and categories were constructed to reflect the data from study participants and documents. To the extent possible, the results of the analysis were verified by key informant study participants and cross-checked with other data sources.

Results

Two major empirical assertions evolved from the present study. The first empirical assertion was based on the evolution of parental involvement with time and socialization to the dominant culture. With each ensuing generation, Japanese American parents became more active and directly involved in the education of their children. The second empirical assertion addressed the perceived barriers to parental involvement. Five items were cited as barriers to parental involvement of Japanese Americans in Hawaii. The barriers were one's: ability to communicate effectively in English, degree of Americanization, familiarity with American school functions, economic survival, and educational background. Each of the five barriers had differing degrees of influence on each succeeding generation studied. A summary of the results derived from each generation follows.

Isseis were found to be the least involved in the education of their children among the three generations studied. The primary obstacle to greater parental involvement for Isseis was the inability to communicate and understand English. For Isseis, communicating with their children was accomplished primarily through a mixture of Japanese and Pidgin English. Although the mixture of Japanese and Pidgin English afforded communication between Isseis and Niseis, the essence of messages were often lost in translation. The result of this inability to communicate in exact terms served as a barrier to more involved parental participation.

As immigrants, Isseis were the least Americanized of the three generations examined. Having held close cultural ties to Japan, Isseis did not actively pursue a rapid transformation to American norms. The cultural distance between Isseis and the American school system contributed to the lack of parental involvement. Another factor related to cultural distance which explained why Isseis were not highly involved with the education of their children was due to their unfamiliarity with the operation of American schools. The perception of Issei parents was to leave the education of their children to the public school and its authorities. Isseis held teachers in high esteem and rarely attended or questioned the public school's educational program, goals, or methods of instruction.

Finally, economic survival was a critical element which minimized the parental involvement of Isseis. As a group, Isseis were at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Despite their lowly socioeconomic status, Isseis had an undying faith in the benefits of an education for their children. Issei parents made a number of sacrifices to provide their children with an education. Some of the noted sacrifices Isseis endured were: working extra hours in hard plantation labor, not affording any modern conveniences, and sacrificing family time. For Isseis, parental involvement was limited to emotional support and minimizing their children's worries of a low socioeconomic existence. The primary contribution of Isseis to the

education of their children, albeit indirectly, was to provide a stable and educationally nurturing environment.

In contrast to Isseis, Niseis were more directly involved in the education of their children. Being the first generation educated in American schools, Niseis were Americanized by their educational experiences. Unlike Isseis, language, cultural differences and unfamiliarity with schools were not barriers to parental involvement in school related activities. Although economic factors were a major concern for Niseis as they climbed the socioeconomic ladder, economics did not play as debilitating a role towards parental involvement as it had for Isseis.

Niseis were more directly involved in assisting their children with academic work. The extent of academic parental involvement depended on the education and experiences of the parent. The primary area of parental involvement for Niseis was extracurricular activities. Nisei parents participated in a wide array of extracurricular activities from chaperones at school functions to coaches of athletic teams. The level of parental involvement in extracurricular activities was based on individual interest and personal attachment (having a child involved in the particular activity).

Like Niseis, Sanseis were more directly involved in the education of their children than Isseis. Sansei parents did not encounter the language, cultural, or familiarity barriers toward parental involvement. A number of Sansei study participants mentioned their direct involvement in academic as well as extracurricular activities of their children. Parental academic involvement tended to decrease as children became older for both Niseis and Sanseis.

The two factors which minimized greater Sansei parental involvement were time and economics. Despite the overall upgrading of their socioeconomic status within society, Sanseis in Hawaii were experiencing economic difficulties in maintaining their view of the American dream. As a result, Sanseis were being forced to cut back on their parental involvement in their children's education in order to maintain their standard of living and socioeconomic position in Hawaiian society. Similar to Isseis, economic survival to provide and/or maintain a certain lifestyle is having a negative impact on the extent of Sansei parental involvement.

Discussion

The present study showed that ensuing generations of Japanese Americans in Hawaii (Isseis, Niseis, and Sanseis) became more active and directly involved in the education of their children. This evolutional development in the parental involvement of Japanese Americans was highly related to language communication and familiarity with the dominant culture. The Americanizing of the Japanese immigrant along with succeeding generations who were educated in American schools reflected the role an

American parent played in the education of their children. For the immigrant generation, a number of social, economical, and cultural difficulties acted as barriers to parental participation. With the exception of time and economics, succeeding generations were not hampered by the same barriers as the immigrant generation. It remains to be seen what degree of impact, time and economics will have on the continued parental involvement of Japanese Americans in Hawaii.

In conclusion, cultural differences to the dominant culture and language difficulties were significant factors in the lack of parental involvement. Based on the results of the present study, parental involvement programs need to recognize, account, and respect cultural differences to the dominant culture. By considering cultural and language differences, educators will be able to develop a more effective means of involving parents from diverse cultures.

Educational Importance of the Study

The present study represents a step towards understanding the parental involvement of one ethnic group in education. The present study focused on the extent to which Japanese American parents were involved in the educational aspects of their children in Hawaii. The present study is important to educators since it documents historically how the first three generations of Japanese American parents in America involved themselves in the education of their children. As the present study demonstrated, involving parents in the education of their children meant different things to different generations. In addition to generational differences, the present study demonstrated the importance of taking into account the cultural background of the parents. The cultural background of the parents, especially of ethnic minority immigrants is a factor which educators need to assess more carefully before implementing a parental involvement program. Without such assessments, educators run the risk of neglecting cultural aspects which often define underlying reasons for parental behavior. In addition, educators should not assume that parental involvement is an ideal solution for all parties. Parents of ethnic minority immigrant students can constructively contribute to their children's education in other ways besides direct involvement (i.e., providing a stable, secure, and nurturing environment for learning, along with economic security). Cultural differences may dictate different approaches toward achieving the same goal. While the notion of involving parents in the education of their children is a widely supported concept among educators, further investigation should address the individual needs of diverse ethnic groups.

The present investigation of the parental involvement of Japanese Americans provides insight as a future reference for dealing with the issue of parental involvement of ethnic minorities. Examining the results of the present investigation provides a case study of how one ethnic minority group evolved and dealt with the issue of parental involvement.

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